

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-41622-1 - Regicide and Restoration: English Tragicomedy, 1660-1671

Nancy Klein Maguire

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction



... literary form is ultimately imprinted with the ideology of the age.

Laura Brown, *English Dramatic Form, 1660–1760*

The prologue to the first play presented at the Cockpit-in-Court after the Restoration reminded the audience that ‘They that would have no KING, would have no *Play*: / The *Laurel* and the *Crown* together went, / Had the same *Foes*, and the same *Banishment*.¹ Uniquely associated during the reign of Charles I and during the Interregnum, both theatre and monarchy were beginning anew in 1660 and followed a parallel process in their post-Restoration rehabilitation. During the decade following the restoration of Charles II, they seesawed toward a new culture, vacillating between tradition and innovation. *Regicide and Restoration* tells the story of cultural models peculiar to this decade.

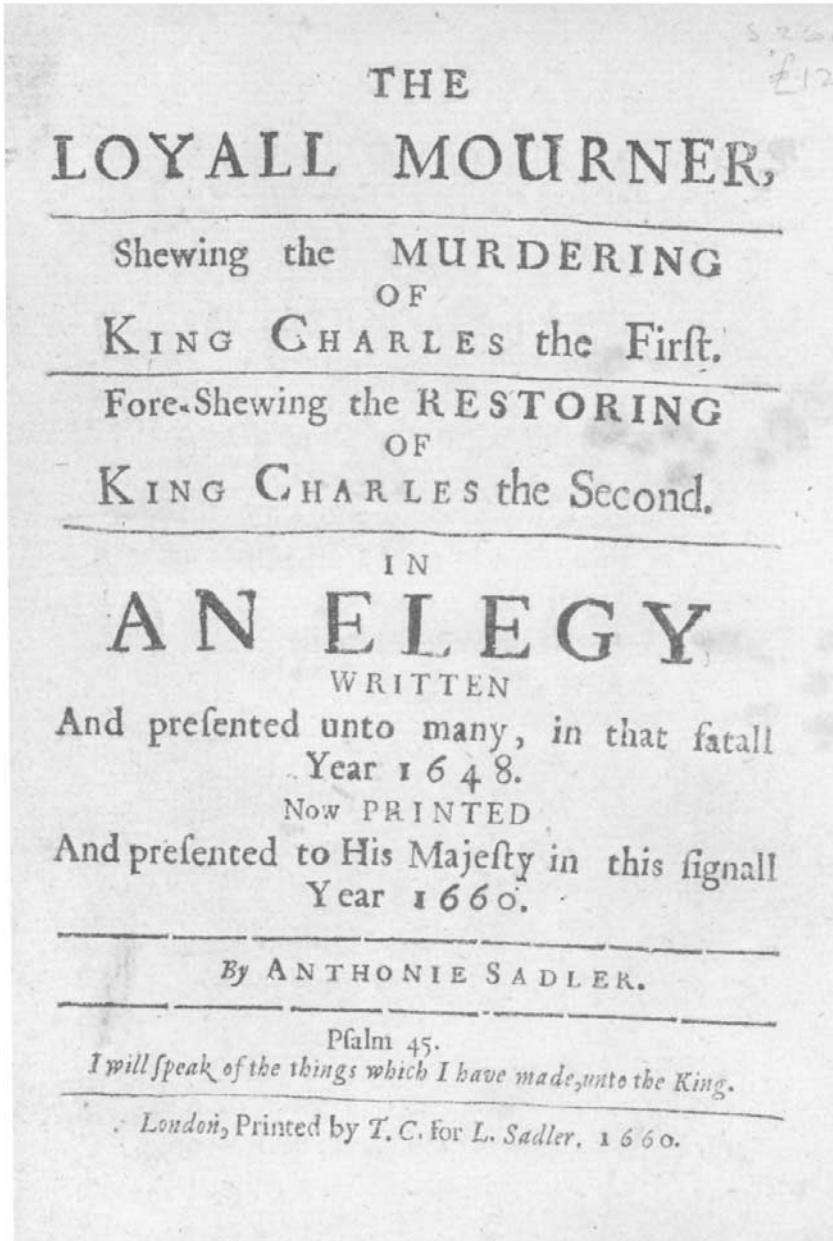
When the theatres reopened, the Renaissance genres reappeared, and tragicomedy and the court masque stepped to one side of the public theatre and comedy to the other. Tragedy, the greatest of the Renaissance genres, had vanished. Focusing on the directions taken by tragicomedy and the court masque, *Regicide and Restoration* accounts for the shift in the generic system. Deliberately excluding the more familiar experiments with formal comedy proper,² *Regicide and Restoration* considers the uncharted tragicomedies written by

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-41622-1 - Regicide and Restoration: English Tragicomedy, 1660-1671

Nancy Klein Maguire

Excerpt

[More information](#)Fig. 1 *The Loyall Mourner*, printed 1660.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-41622-1 - Regicide and Restoration: English Tragicomedy, 1660-1671

Nancy Klein Maguire

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

3

unknown playwrights and the young John Dryden. Conflating the familiar tragicomedies of John Fletcher and the Stuart court masque, the amateur playwrights developed two new forms of tragicomedy which flourished during this decade. These plays tell us much more than the comedies about the changing paradigm. The simpler and starker of the forms – which I call divided tragicomedy – more clearly shows the lines of generic and political development and is paradigmatic of the more complex subgenre, in Dryden's terms, the heroic play. I designate the subgenre as the rhymed heroic 'masque'.³

The reopening of the theatre reverberated as an unmitigated victory yell for the Royalists. Since Charles II recognized the propaganda value of theatre, and relished drama personally, nearly all of the new playwrights were politicians who became playwrights either to gain or to enhance their political credibility. Whether triumphant after twenty years of fidelity to the Stuart cause or hopeful that they could blot out their Cromwellian allegiances, the playwrights, like other Royalists, defended the traditional power-structure in an attempt to rehabilitate themselves and their culture. In tragicomic rituals reenacting regicide and restoration, they promoted kingship in the new circumstances by exonerating themselves of the execution of Charles I while celebrating the restoration of his son. Theatre-goers with different commitments to monarchy obviously interpreted the symbolism in varying ways, but regardless of how theatre-goers interpreted the ritual, which at times worked subliminally, the playwrights adapted a mono-causal explanation of regicide and restoration – the party-line explanation. This book, therefore, concerns the 'above' rather than the 'below' of political history, deliberately omitting republicans as well as other radicals so well described by Christopher Hill and Richard L. Greaves.⁴

Royalists, and even ultra-Royalists, illuminate part of the picture of the mid-century crash, yet, with the exception of Ronald Hutton's work,⁵ recent historiography has left the Royalist *mentalité* 'in the shadows', to use David Underdown's phrase, and stressed non-Royalist aspects of restoration.⁶ In *The Cavalier Parliament and the Reconstruction of the Old Regime, 1661–1667*, for example, Paul Seaward privileges Parliament, where he seems to locate the sinews of power, over monarchy.⁷ Yet the symbol of power in Parliament was the king; Cynthia Herrup insists: 'A sitting king was the center of the

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-41622-1 - Regicide and Restoration: English Tragicomedy, 1660-1671

Nancy Klein Maguire

Excerpt

[More information](#)

English structure of power – the center of politics, of culture, of law, and religion'.⁸ Even if Seaward's interpretation of the 1660s accounts for the structural nature of political development, the mystique of 'a sitting king' anchored the emotional and imaginative lives of many Englishmen.

Regicide and Restoration insists that for Royalists, at least, kingship embodied intangible but fundamental values. The frontispiece to this book (and to *The Loyall Mourner*), engraved by Robert Vaughan in 1649, figures the depth of the attachment to monarchy. In 'The Author on His Frontispiece', the minister Anthony Sadler carefully interprets the 'Moral of the Model', Chronicling the providential story of regicide and restoration, Sadler explains that '*The Tree, / Presents the King: cut down, – His Tragedy*'. He preaches:

The Root, not Dead – doth Emblemize the strength,
Of happy Hope, to Sprout again, at length.
The lively Branches –, are the Issue Royall;

...

The Taller Branch, its growing through a Crown;
The King his Birth-right shews; the Crown his Own.

The descriptive text under the picture, a quotation from Job, emphasizes that although 'ye root of it wax old in ye Earth . . . by the sent of water it will bud, & bring forth boughs like a Plant'. The hand coming out of the clouds, of course, is God's, with the water pot being divine providence. In Underdown's words, 'It was a myth, but it was a powerful one'⁹.

Even Christopher Hill stresses the 'still surviving magical aura of kingship'.¹⁰ Certainly, attitudes toward kingship varied, but by Spring, 1660, most Englishmen wanted the return of Charles II. The purist republican Algernon Sidney, in fact, acknowledged, 'I owe him the duty and the service that belongs unto a subject, and will pay it'.¹¹ Kingship, of course, could no longer be felt as an imaginative whole after the execution of Charles I, and on the eve and early years of the Restoration, an earlier Royalist iconography struggled to relocate a myth whose aura may have survived its supporting rationale. Indeed, the very uneasiness of this project may have generated conspicuous activity in tragicomedy, always an unstable and only partly definable genre. The playwrights embedded the shifty monarchical myth into the very structure of the tragicomic subgenres.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-41622-1 - Regicide and Restoration: English Tragicomedy, 1660-1671

Nancy Klein Maguire

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

5

This work attempts to explain the nature of the experience of regicide and restoration and the hold these events had on the Royalist imagination, or, more likely, on the English imagination. The dramatists, some of whom had a role in political life, attempted to create drama which responded to what they believed to be the unjust execution of their monarch and the restoration of his son. Betraying an obsession with figures of monarchy, with usurpation and regicide, and with recuperation of royal power, the playwrights manifest anxiety about the regicide and fear of unforeseen complications about restoration. After all, as Greaves points out, the Restoration came about less from 'a principled love of monarchy than a desire to preserve property and social order'.¹² Facing the cultural memory of the 'Martyred Monarch' who had captured all the aura of kingship, the dramatists also faced the pragmatic reality of his son who, as Tim Harris observes, 'could not live up to his image of 1660 – a majestic and semi-divine monarch; in reality, he proved to be a rather debauched, worldly man, preoccupied with venereal delights'.¹³ Reflecting and attempting to negotiate a maelstrom of mixed government and mixed feelings which could not otherwise be resolved, the monarchical tragicomedies of the 1660s function as an analysis of the psychic forces which impelled the mid-century generation of Royalists. Like a Rorschach test, early Restoration drama tells us much about the emotional history of the civil war and Interregnum years.

John Morrill contends that the mid-century crisis was 'a revolution in the consciousness of those who lived through it, and it was transmitted to their children and their children's children'.¹⁴ Various perceptions of the Martyred Monarch were also transmitted. In 1649, and even more so eleven years later, Englishmen perceived the act of regicide from different viewpoints and with varying levels of intensity. Lois Potter describes the polarized perceptions of Royalists and Parliamentarians,¹⁵ but individuals within these two groups probably experienced the execution in diverse ways.¹⁶ For some dissenters, the beheading of Charles I disclosed previously unconsidered freedoms and could well have been cathartic; Sidney purportedly called the execution 'the justest and bravest acti[o]n that ever was done in England or anywhere'.¹⁷ At another extreme, John Quarles articulates the intransigent ultra-Royalist, and perhaps even Royalist, perception (and politicization) of the

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-41622-1 - Regicide and Restoration: English Tragicomedy, 1660-1671

Nancy Klein Maguire

Excerpt

[More information](#)

execution in 1649 and also in 1660 – ‘*The worst of Tyrants, kill’d the best of Kings*’.¹⁸ Whether or not we believe Bishop Gilbert Burnet’s claim that the ‘serious and christian deportment’ of Charles I in 1649 ‘made all his former errors be entirely forgot, and raised a compassionate regard to him, that drew a lasting hatred on the actors, and was the true occasion of the great turn of the nation in the year 1660’,¹⁹ the memory of the ‘best of Kings’²⁰ certainly helped restore his son. In Jonathan Scott’s words, ‘it fell to the second half of the century to become comprehensively haunted by the first’,²¹ and the Restoration propaganda machine relentlessly exploited the guilt association with the act of regicide.

If drama reflects society, one should not be surprised that tragicomedy, a form split (or contradictory) in its very conception, dominates the 1660s. As a simplified, oversized, and hyperbolic paradigm, the tragicomedy of the Restoration decade suggests how at least one segment of the English nation experienced the complex events of mid-century. Genre draws on history, and the very word ‘tragicomedy’ suggests the dilemma of a society which yoked together absolutes as contradictory as regicide and restoration. The clear split into ‘Death’ and ‘happy Restauration’ in the subtitle of the anonymous *Cromwell’s Conspiracy* (1660) indicates the tragicomic dilemma: ‘Beginning at the Death of King *Charles* the First, And ending with the happy Restauration of King *Charles* the Second.’ Juxtaposing the unalterable fact of usurping and disrupting regicide with the equally unalterable (and to some unpalatable) fact of pragmatic restoration, the politician/playwrights splinted the themes of regicide and restoration together. Seaward claims that ‘The most profound legacy of the Civil War and Interregnum was not, indeed, any growth in the political maturity and sophistication of the nation, but rather the enduring divisions that they had created within it’.²² It is not by accident that this stridently Royalist tragicomedy blazons an unrelenting sense of division.

In a sense, both chronologically and thematically, *Regicide and Restoration* follows Jerzy Limon’s and Martin Butler’s closely documented studies of political theatre.²³ Like Limon’s *Dangerous Matter: English Drama and Politics in 1623/24* and Butler’s *Theatre and Crisis 1632–1642*, this work attempts to analyze the function of drama in a particular historical context. The questions generated by Restoration tragicomedy, however, demand more complex and ambi-

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-41622-1 - Regicide and Restoration: English Tragicomedy, 1660-1671

Nancy Klein Maguire

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

7

valent answers than those afforded by Limon's close reading of censorship or even by Butler's more comprehensive study of the 1630s. Like Butler, I offer a case study of a decade; theatre after crisis, however, differs considerably from theatre in crisis. The evasion of censorship continues, surely, but for the first time, those in power promoted a consciously contrived campaign to build a new monarchy and a new culture. Although Restoration drama follows the political tendencies of the earlier drama in trying to have an effect on government, its political curve is inverse; whereas the earlier drama criticized the regime in power, the Restoration playwrights bolstered the new government by organizing a theatrical/political network which produced pro-Stuart propaganda.

The dangerous matter of 1649 had clearly precipitated a cultural as well as a political collapse. The resulting turmoil eludes the grasp of thematic analysis (in a loose sense, replaying the civil war) or other merely documentary analyses. To grapple with the culture's transformed understanding of power requires a close attention to the particular history of the 1660s and an understanding of cultural change, particularly the patterns of semiotic behaviour during cultural change. Yu M. Lotman and B. A. Uspensky's paradigmatic model, 'On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture', gives us a sense of how cultural change might work, and I broadly follow their apposite model to decode the crisis of regicide and restoration. In Lotman and Uspensky's paradigm, every culture shares two characteristics: culture is always (1) a 'closed-off area against the background of nonculture' and (2) appears as a system of signs dependant upon the '*nonhereditary memory of the community*'.²⁴ Within a particular society, therefore, culture organizes the world around its members. The architects of the new Restoration culture, closing off Royalism from any tinge of the nonculture of dissent, used the signs associated with the trappings of monarchy, including theatre, to encircle the emerging culture. Accepting Lotman and Uspensky's model, and incorporating production details, poems, letters, and other semiotic material, I use two minor forms of tragicomedy as keys to unlock the relationship between cultural process and generic development. This framework, of course, opens the trauma of regicide and restoration into wider chronological and multi-national significance.

The questions posed by this approach are as formidable as the results are rewarding. For instance, how and why did these forms of

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-41622-1 - Regicide and Restoration: English Tragicomedy, 1660-1671

Nancy Klein Maguire

Excerpt

[More information](#)

tragicomedy develop? Why did they dominate the stage for a decade and then disappear by 1671? Admittedly, ‘why’ and ‘how’ are complex questions; many things feed into what Dryden in his translation of *Plutarchs Lives* (1683) calls the ‘springs and motives’ of change and making ‘guesses of secret causes’ is problematical (xvii: 271, 272). Prying into the tragicomedy of this decade provokes unnerving diachronic and synchronic questions: What does ‘new’ mean when the legacy of the old is so strong? How do the new forms relate to their generic heritage? And by what process do the new constructs achieve a separate status? These wide-ranging and uncomfortable questions disclose tragicomedies, long regarded as trivial, which are, in fact, serious attempts to come to terms with the historical events of 1640–70; specifically, these plays are deeply felt and meditated responses to the execution of Charles I, arguably the most important political event in the seventeenth century.

The playwrights exploited theatre as a platform for protecting Royalist interests, and Carolean (the term for the reign of Charles II)²⁵ tragicomedy inevitably intersected with political and constitutional developments; the Restoration decade was not static in either sense, and for the non-specialist reader, a capsule history, a road-map of the decade, might be useful.

Although General George Monk left Scotland in October of 1659, and by May of 1660 had empowered the Restoration of Charles II, the coronation did not take place until St. George’s Day, April 23, 1661. As the details of the coronation procession from John Ogilby’s *The Entertainment of His Most Excellent Majestie Charles II* intimate (see the chapter headpieces),²⁶ all England seemed to rejoice in the coronation. In April, 1660, Charles signed the Declaration of Breda, pardoning all but seven regicides. Yet even before the coronation, Thomas Venner’s Rising, an abortive attempt to seize the capital, threatened the euphoria of Restoration. As early as 1662, disenchantment with a philandering king so unlike his martyred father also threatened Restoration. Little suspecting that both plague and fire would abet the Dutch, and goaded on by his conquest-hungry brother James, after months of sabre-rattling and posturing, Charles was compelled by face-saving pressures to declare war in 1665. By early July of the same year, the government left London to escape the plague, and by the beginning of the next year, Louis XIV joined forces with the Dutch. Eight months later, on 2 September 1666, the Great Fire of London blazed, and taxes, including the infamous

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-41622-1 - Regicide and Restoration: English Tragicomedy, 1660-1671

Nancy Klein Maguire

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

9

Hearth Tax, soared. In 1667, in the midst of constitutional and monarchical challenges, Charles needed a scapegoat, and infuriated by Edward Hyde's increasingly domineering and critical stance, he hounded his Lord Chancellor from office and from England. Hindered by a plethora of unpopular mistresses and new illegitimate children, Charles struggled to control Parliament with the help of Sir Thomas Osborne, later Earl of Danby. By the end of this precarious decade, however, he faced another impending crisis in his brother James's conversion to Catholicism.

The very topicality of Carolean tragicomedy, I suspect, encourages indifference and misreading. Limon, in fact, points out that 'The more a literary work is "engaged" in contemporary politics . . . the more confined its meaning becomes to one particular time and society (or section of society)'.²⁷ Although a close historical reading of these early plays provides richer and more ambivalent drama, critics frequently dismiss this corpus as out of touch with the 1660s; Bonamy Dobrée, for example, describes the rhymed heroic plays as 'Outside the main tradition . . . curious objects that we turn over in our hands not without a certain sympathy'.²⁸ Even though Eric Rothstein, Frances M. Kavenik, Geoffrey Marshall, Susan Staves, and Nicholas Jose have begun to reconsider the social and political context of Restoration drama,²⁹ arguing against the earlier 'essentially frivolous' position,³⁰ they have generally left the drama of the sixties to theatre historians. These scholars, of course, are mainly concerned with the awkward growth of the new theatres and generally ignore the content of the plays. Although Robert D. Hume, for example, has written inclusively in the field of Restoration drama, he has said little about the earliest drama and generally considers only theatre history.

However neglected the drama of the early Restoration, Carolean tragicomedy has been even more neglected. In his survey of Restoration drama, Hume stresses 'the extreme untidiness of the "tragicomedy" category' – clearly, it *is* chaotic, schizoid, and problematic. Laura Brown, attempting to tidy this disorderly genre, looks at the 'studied contradiction' of Restoration tragicomedy and concludes that the form is a 'perfect reconciliation of neoclassicism and pragmatism'. J. Douglas Canfield attacks Brown's aesthetic position, claiming that the divided tragicomedies of the Restoration 'affirm a hierarchical social order . . . ultimately validated by a divine providence'.³¹ Canfield correctly assumes an ideological substructure but

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-41622-1 - Regicide and Restoration: English Tragicomedy, 1660-1671

Nancy Klein Maguire

Excerpt

[More information](#)

clearly misreads and underestimates its complexity, thus missing the depth and breadth of Restoration tragicomedy.

Opportunely, the decade between the reopening of the theatres and the *Conquest of Granada* gives us a chronologically isolated environment – almost a laboratory – in which to observe the why and how of generic development. I first approach the task thematically by looking at all the tragicomedies of the decade, and I then look in depth at Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery, and John Dryden. Chronologically, my study begins with Sir William Davenant's 'first' rhymed heroic play, *The Siege of Rhodes* (1656, 1661), and formally ends with the epitome of the subgenre, Dryden's 1670–1 *Conquest of Granada* – which Allardyce Nicoll calls 'a grand vindication of this particular species'.³² The structure of *Regicide and Restoration* follows the process of generic development and, in that sense, is approximately chronological. Plays, even those initiating new genres, are written by playwrights, and I begin by looking at the background of the necessarily amateur playwrights, emphasizing the formative impact of the act of regicide. Who were the playwrights? What were their affiliations with the Stuart monarchy? What influences formed their politics? The playwrights used drama to politicize the new regime, and we next look at examples of these political and generic experiments. The first fumbling efforts of the new playwrights recreate their (and their audience's) recent experience of dislocation and foreshadow the new subgenres in an early form. Indeed, by the time the plague forced the theatres to close in 1665, both subgenres were fully defined.

The following four chapters, discussing the more integrated and professional plays written during the second half of the decade, make various conjectures about the generic process. I argue, for example, that the bipartite dramatic tradition of Fletcherian tragicomedy and court masque provided the structural framework for the new subgenres. Contrary to accepted critical opinion, I emphasize the continuing influence of the court masque and contend that the Carolean political/playwrights transformed the court masque into the rhymed heroic play. Illustrated most prominently in the works of Orrery and Dryden, the rhymed heroic play functioned for Charles II as the court masque proper functioned for his father. Differentiating the two subgenres and analyzing (and beginning to define) the rhymed heroic play as it emerged in 1666, I examine the